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ABSTRACT

This monograph considers the prospects for improving teacher engagement in urban schools through professional and organizational reform. Urban education is a special context for teaching, with the complications of social, political, and organizational conditions that make the schools difficult settings. One of the problems is increasing teacher detachment and alienation from their work and their students. Research is summarized that finds that while it is not possible to change the social origins or community resources of students, it may be possible to change the relationship between social class and teacher commitment and engagement if organizational conditions are created that make it easier for teachers to experience success. Teachers must be engaged in four ways: with the schools, the students, and academic achievement as a goal and with a body of knowledge. Profiles are presented of three public, nonselective, urban high schools with high teacher engagement from a sample of eight schools in which the reform process was studied. Characteristics of school culture and organization that promote the four types of engagement are explored. Engagement is most profoundly intensified when there is a sense of vision or purpose about education and the specific students served. (Contains 52 references.) (SLD)

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Urban Monograph Series

Organizational Structures to Promote Teacher Engagement in Urban Schools

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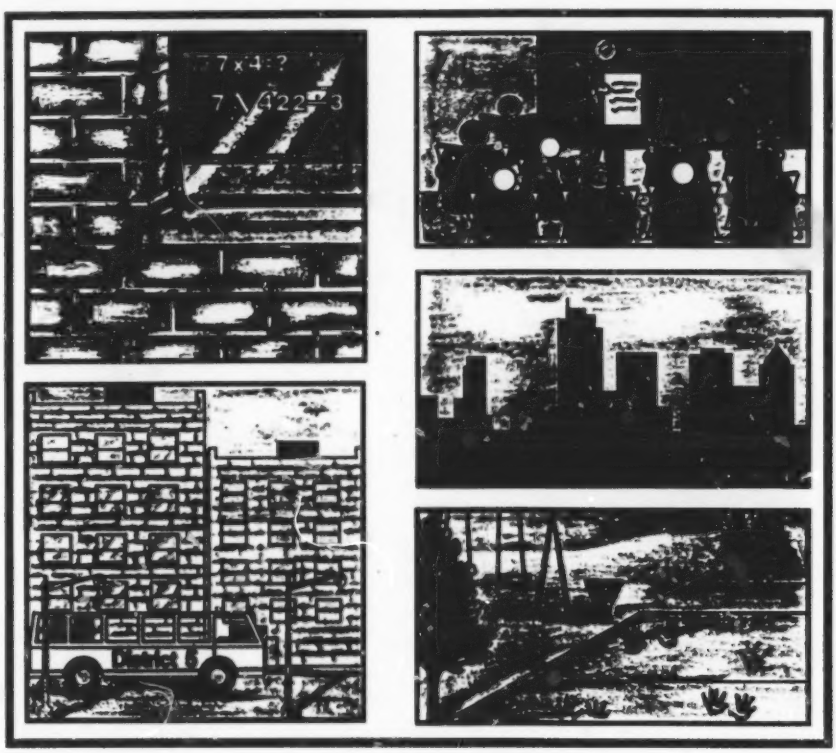

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Part of *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision to Guide Change in Beliefs and Practice*

A set of papers from the Urban Education National Network (UENN) of the nation's Regional Educational Laboratories

NCREL

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The Urban Education Program's mission is to improve education for urban children and youth, especially those who are underachieving and historically underserved. We provide products and services that connect superintendents, principals, and teachers from nearly 5,000 urban schools to research and best practice. We work in partnership with schools and districts to build capacity for (1) teaching advanced skills to all students, (2) implementing multicultural education, (3) leading school change and innovation, and (4) supporting professional development that promotes whole school change.

This monograph was commissioned as part of *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision to Guide Change in Beliefs and Practice*, a set of papers from the Urban Education National Network (UENN) of the nation's Regional Educational Laboratories. An abridged version of *Organizational Structures to Promote Teacher Engagement in Urban Schools* appears in *Closing the Achievement Gap* as *Teacher Engagement and Real Reform in Urban Schools*.

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Dear Colleague:

Many urban students complete school and make a successful transition to higher education. However, an increasing number of poor and minority youth either drop out or finish school without the skills and knowledge they need to continue their education and participate in today's high-tech, information-service economy.

NCREL believes that connecting practitioners and policymakers to information about what works in urban schools is an important step in bridging the achievement gap between the region's urban children and others. Traditionally, solutions to problems of urban schools have focused on isolated programs or single subjects and have relied heavily on knowledge from one field—education. The achievement gap between urban children and others is the result of many factors. Solutions that draw on a broad knowledge base are more likely to be effective in attacking the problems that impede urban children's success in school than solutions that rely solely on knowledge about schooling.

The Urban Education Monograph Series connects practitioners and policymakers to important information about what works in urban schools by drawing on knowledge from the fields of education, sociology, cultural anthropology, and others. The series includes the following papers:

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- *Multicultural Education: Challenges to Administrators and School Leadership* (Carol Lee, Northwestern University, with an introduction by John Attinasi, California State University)
- *Developing Resilience in Urban Youth* (Linda Winfield, University of Southern California)
- *Organizational Structures to Promote Teacher Engagement in Urban Schools* (Karen Seashore Louis, University of Minnesota at Minneapolis)
- *Getting Ready to Provide School-Linked, Integrated Services* (Jeanne Jehl, San Diego Public Schools and Michael Kirst, Stanford University)
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We welcome your comments on the Urban Education Monograph Series and your suggestions about other issues that you would like us to address in the future.

Sincerely,

Lynn J. Stinnette
Director, Urban Education

Preface

The Regional Educational Laboratory Network

During the nearly three decades since their inception, the regional educational laboratories (funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education) have proven to be valuable resources in their regions. Each laboratory identifies regional needs and develops resources to help meet them. In cooperation with partners in the state and intermediate education agencies, universities, professional associations, foundations, businesses, and other social service agencies, the laboratories provide programs and services to schools and others working to improve education.

In 1992, the Regional Educational Laboratory Network was established in recognition of the growing need for coordinated national responses to America's educational challenges and the potential of the laboratories working collaboratively to help meet this need. All ten laboratories have joined together to formalize, consolidate, and extend their capability to act as a national system.

The structure for achieving this goal is a set of collaborative projects, staffed and supported by all or a subset of the regional laboratories. Each project has an originating (or "lead") laboratory which provides a project coordinator. The coordinator forms a steering committee (called the design team) to shape the project plan and activities. Collaborating laboratories then provide one or more staff, usually part-time, to help carry out the project.

The Urban Education National Network

In an effort to support the restructuring efforts of the nation's urban school districts, the Urban Education National Network (UENN) was established in 1993 to (1) consolidate the knowledge base in urban education, and (2) bring focus to the expertise and resources in urban education that exist in the regional educational laboratories. A central role of the network will be to provide information and assistance to educators as they work to increase the academic performance of urban students whose traditions and experiences are not adequately represented within the current educational system. The UENN task force also seeks to contribute to present reform proposals and activities being carried out at both the national and local community levels.

Disturbing numbers of poor and minority students in our urban schools continue to underachieve academically. In spite of years of reform, a persistent achievement gap remains between students in our urban schools and elsewhere. Many practitioners and policymakers concur that this situation cannot persist; urban students must be given the caliber of education they need to fully contribute to our democratic society. Simply stating that our goal is "higher achievement for all students" isn't enough. What we know about transforming our nation's city schools is the need to impart knowledge about what works best in the urban context and provide them ongoing support for their reform efforts.

A groundswell of activity on behalf of urban learners and their schools is being generated at the local level. Local communities, including parents, citizens, educators, and business persons, are mobilizing to redesign their educational and human development organizations to better serve urban children and their families through a system of integrated services. Much of this activity has grown out of recent efforts by urban districts to decentralize bureaucracies that have often impeded change and innovation at the local school level. Additional activity has resulted from reform efforts taking place in social service agencies serving urban children and their families.

The movement toward integrated services is but one of the newer conceptualizations of student development, the teaching-learning process, and educational groups that are convening to support the restructuring of urban school districts. Conventional educational approaches are being altered, in some places radically, to prepare urban schools and teachers to educate students of the 21st century.

This collection of papers has been commissioned by the UENN to:

- Define the nature of the urban academic performance obstacles (i.e., clarify the obstacles to the development of urban lifelong learners, such as the lack of curriculum relevance and authenticity) and describe supportive environments, appropriate staff development, and meaningful instruction and assessments for urban learners.

- Identify, validate, and disseminate a knowledge base of theory and practice that will better inform the laboratory system and decisionmaking relevant to overcoming these performance obstacles.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES TO PROMOTE TEACHER ENGAGEMENT IN URBAN SCHOOLS[1]

Karen Seashore Louis
University of Minnesota

Introduction

As we face the future of urban public education in the 21st century, perhaps only one fact is inescapably clear: Our student population will be increasingly multicultural and from families of lower socioeconomic status. This demographic shift challenges schools to engage in massive reforms, ranging from providing on-site social services to developing fundamentally new curricula that will spark interest in learning among the new generations of students. There is increasing public recognition of this need to address changing student characteristics, but little attention to how this demographic shift affects teachers. This monograph considers the prospects for improving teacher engagement in urban schools through professional and organizational reform. Simply stated, however, creating a teaching force that has the energy and skill to teach today's urban students requires more than matching students and teachers or improving the skills of individual educators. Rather, it requires the creation of schools where, together with their colleagues, all teachers are learners (Lieberman, 1988; Senge, 1990).

The systemic reform literature (Fuhrman, 1993) argues that real improvement in schools will not occur unless the professional development of teachers is more clearly focused on specific student learning outcomes and a common curriculum. In response to the arguments linking increases in teachers' opportunities to learn to gains for students, the recent Goals 2000 legislation added teacher professional development to the list of national educational objectives. The notion that teacher development is central to the process and outcomes of reform is consistent with the arguments put forward in this paper, but the reasoning presented below is somewhat different. Of course, teacher skills and professional knowledge must be increased to match new curriculum and learning goals if student performance is to improve, but skills and knowledge will not be enough unless other aspects of teachers' work also improve. In particular, the changing conditions of schools decrease traditional intrinsic rewards for teachers and increase uncertainty, both of which reduce teacher commitment to and engagement in their work. Yet, as research reported below will indicate, modest changes in the conditions under which urban teachers work can make dramatic differences in their engagement.

Urban Education as a Special Context for Teaching

The conditions in some of our schools are so bad, and the physical and social environments in which these schools are located are so frightful, that we may have to cross off some . . . as expendable. (Halpin, 1966, as quoted in Englert, 1993, p. 3.)

Creating high-quality working environments for teachers is an issue in all schools, but this paper emphasizes the problematic working conditions in large cities, where the dilemmas and failures of our educational system are nowhere more apparent. Also, as exemplified in the quotation above, the deficiencies of urban education are a source of considerable ambivalence and even downright hostility for both the public and the policymakers, who don't see solutions to the intersecting problems that characterize our cities, of which education is only one. Because poor, minority or first-generation immigrant students are increasingly concentrated in urban areas, to ignore these schools is to ignore the needs of our most vulnerable students and teachers. Unfortunately, quick fixes are not immediately apparent.

Previous policies for improving urban schools have often been linked to simple financial or structural reforms that focus exclusively on students, ranging from subsidies for schools with poorer students to magnet schools/schools of choice, to the introduction of specially structured curriculum/testing programs. Rarely have we looked seriously at incremental approaches to building the human support system in urban schools. This paper does not focus on the characteristics of urban schools that may make them less effective for children (see Englert, 1993; Cibulka, Reed, & Wong, 1992), but on those that affect teachers' motivation and ability to teach all students who appear at the classroom door. Before I enumerate the features of urban schools that can make them vital places for professional growth, I will first briefly outline the reasons why they are often difficult settings for adult work and professional development. These include socioeconomic, political, and organizational conditions that, while not unique, converge to make urban schools demanding places for teachers.

Socioeconomic Conditions

The social and economic characteristics of urban communities have significant implications for teachers' work. Urban schools may be overwhelmed by the problems that their students bring to class. These problems make it more difficult for the school to engage successfully with normal dilemmas of instruction. For example, Louis, Rosenblum, and Molitor (1981) found that the larger the proportion of disadvantaged students in a school, the lower the school's capacities to engage in an effective problem-solving process. Schools also receive less support in educating children when most parents are disadvantaged and the immediate communities are low in easily accessible resources (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). The assumption, based on theories of social capital, is that lower-income communities have fewer human resources to supplement the work of schools.[2] For example, in more affluent communities there may be intersecting networks that include parents and members of the business community, both of whom have an interest in a healthy school system; these networks may be absent in many of our poorer urban communities. This premise is supported by Garner & Raudenbush (1991) who show that children in low-income communities perform more

poorly on achievement tests than peers from similar families who live in higher socioeconomic status (SES) communities. The double disadvantage of poor students and poor communities puts a particular strain on teachers, who are often from different socioeconomic backgrounds than their students, yet who must organize curriculum and instruction that will engage and connect the classroom to the student's own experience.

Neighborhood wealth has an additional impact on teachers because the limited resources of the community may also affect access to resources outside the community. For example, urban schools are harder to reform because many of them are weakly linked to the natural professional networks through which ideas are diffused. During the mid-80s, only a tiny fraction of urban schools based any major change efforts on the then-popular "effective schools" literature (Louis & Miles, 1990). This suggests that they were not well-connected to the many change agents who were promoting these principles at the time. Many major schools of education have recently developed "professional practice" relationships with local schools, but few of these are in major urban districts. Internal human resources may also be limited due to the socioeconomic setting: Rollow and Bryk (1995) note that the Chicago Public School System is staffed largely by teachers who went through that system, received their teacher training locally, and have taught in no other district. While this is, in part, because urban systems like to "hire their own," it is also very likely due to the general preference of teachers from more affluent and cosmopolitan backgrounds for other teaching venues. While the Chicago case may be extreme, it is not the only instance in which the inbred character of urban schools diminishes easy access to new ideas.[3]

Political Conditions

All schools exist in a political environment. The goals and means of educating our young are contested everywhere. In urban settings, however, interest group politics mixes with educational politics in a more volatile way than in smaller towns (Peterson, 1985), and this also affects teachers' work. As Louis (1991a) notes, many urban settings display fragmented values concerning education, and, in particular, are more likely to exhibit distance or even antagonism between the professional values of teachers and the concerns of parents and community members. While this can make them exciting places to work, it may also provoke highly politicized local school board elections and responses by unions that are viewed in the community as self-serving. The classic case is the New York controversy over "Ocean Hill-Brownsville," which, 25 years ago, pitted community control advocates against members of the nascent American Federation of Teachers.

Recent restructuring efforts in major cities have almost uniformly revealed deep-seated differences between the proponents of parental control over schooling and those who support professional judgements in school control. There is more likely to be antagonism between professional educators and parents, and there are more parent and community groups that form distinctive perspectives on what should happen to schools. Although unions are often scapegoated in the press, there is some evidence that union militancy is often a response to bureaucratization and political pressure. There is evidence that many urban unions are eager to collaborate in school reform, yet they may feel excluded (McDonnell & Pascal, 1979; Hill, Wise, & Shapiro, 1989).

Urban communities are often ethnically and racially heterogeneous, so "the community" may also be deeply divided. When this diversity is present in a school, it can negatively affect decentralized school improvement efforts (Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, & Sebring, 1993). Under these conditions, many urban districts appear to be "policy vacuums"—lacking clear, organized constituencies; a clear understanding of policy issues and choices; consistency in policy initiatives; and coordination between overlapping or complementary policies (Corwin & Louis, 1982). Policy vacuums lead to unstable educational policies, which also undermine school and teacher efforts to reform (Louis & Miles, 1990).

Fragmented and politicized environments make the development of a community among adults more difficult, in part because all outsiders may be viewed as potential sources of problems for the school. In addition, the absence of serious discussion within the broader educational community about the need for a different approach to instruction for poor, disadvantaged urban youth inhibits debate inside the school. Learning among adults requires recognition and open debate about change conditions by key constituencies as a prerequisite for professional growth and improvement.

Organizational Conditions

In addition to socioeconomic and political circumstances, many organizational conditions need to be addressed before urban schools can be effective. The Carnegie Foundation (1988), for example, pointed to the need for school-based management, clear accountability standards, and intervention procedures when schools are not meeting their objectives. Factors such as school size, teachers' working conditions, and centralized and nonparticipatory decision-making structures may also affect the inclination of teachers to focus their efforts on reform and student learning.

Urban school districts are, almost by definition, large, and urban schools are larger than average (although they are not, especially at the high school level, the largest in the United States). Recent efforts to look at the combined effects of district and school size (which are interconnected) suggest that big is more bureaucratic and also bad for children—at least where students are of lower socioeconomic status (Wahlberg, 1989). For teachers, however, there is an added problem: Larger schools in lower SES communities tend to develop a lesser "sense of community" among teachers than do other schools (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988), and a sense of community is associated with student achievement (Lee & Smith, 1994).

Creating an engaged teaching force that is focused on the common problems of teaching demands a great deal of the faculty, and we would thus hope that the best candidates would step up to the challenges. Yet, urban schools have more difficulty than others in recruiting and retaining the most talented teachers (Englert, 1993, p. 38). This is not, perhaps, surprising when we note that teachers' working conditions in urban schools are often less conducive to energetic involvement in knowledge use and reform than are conditions in newer and/or smaller districts. Salaries are typically lower, and urban teachers are less involved in policy decisions, are treated with less respect by administrators, have fewer opportunities to engage in significant work with each other, and are generally subjected to unprofessional working conditions (Corcoran, Walker, & White, 1988). Teacher turnover may be either too high

(where seniority rights encourage "bumping" of less senior teachers from desirable schools) or too low (in schools with poor reputations) to support effective social construction of knowledge for reform. Each of these features is related to teachers' sense of efficacy and commitment to their work—and each is related to teachers' attitudes, positive or negative, about the students that they teach (Rosenblum, Louis, & Rossmiller, 1994).

The nature of work in urban schools is, in addition, hurried, focused on the short-term, and subject to the interruption shared by teaching in other contexts. No matter what we would like them to be, few teachers and administrators are easily able to be "reflective practitioners" who eagerly seek complex information to improve their work. Rather, they are often harassed and looking for information that will solve today's problem—today. And, in this regard they get little assistance, because urban schools typically lack basic information that would encourage reflection and experimentation (Louis, 1994). In addition, urban districts rarely have information management systems that allow them to gain access to usable data, much less information and ideas that are not immediately familiar (Cibulka, et al., 1992).

Summary

The discussion above has emphasized some social, cultural, political, and organizational characteristics of urban schools that make them difficult settings for teachers. I hasten to point out that the conditions that are often associated with urban schools—disengaged students, social problems that impinge on classroom teaching, and public apathy about local schools—are increasingly characteristic even of affluent suburbia. While an emphasis on improving teachers' working conditions would be beneficial to all schools, it is particularly pressing for urban schools, where other resources supportive of school reform are limited. In the next section, I will explain the link between the conditions discussed above and the problem of improving teacher effort and engagement in teaching.

Teacher Engagement and Student Achievement

Reformers have attributed the problems of student learning to "bad" or "poorly prepared" teachers, but evidence suggests that a more serious problem is an increasing level of teacher detachment and alienation from their work and students (see National Education Association, 1987; Corcoran, et al., 1988; Metz, 1990). Because teachers' work and students' work are inextricably intertwined, alienation is a primary stumbling block to improving student engagement. From the student's point of view, teacher engagement is a prerequisite for student engagement; and from the teacher's point of view, student engagement is the most important predictor of the teacher's interest and effort. In this sense, teacher engagement is a subset of the broader objective of creating effective schools that increase student learning opportunities and improve student achievement. This assumption has received strong support in recent analyses. For example, Bryk & Thum (1989) show that schools in which teachers exhibit higher levels of engagement and commitment are less likely to have high rates of student absenteeism and drop outs, while Wehlage, et al., (1989) provide extensive case studies of programs staffed by engaged teachers, which are highly successful in retaining and improving the achievement of students who are at risk. The "effective schools" research also

suggests strong relationships between schoolwide teacher engagement with students and student achievement (Brookover, et al., 1979; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988), while more recent analyses suggest that high schools in which teachers express a greater sense of responsibility for student learning are also characterized by higher achievement (Lee & Smith, 1994).

Teachers' Dependence on Students and Community: The "Iron Law of Social Class"

> *If teachers' professional satisfaction is tightly linked to students' acquisition of middle-class social competencies and increasing mastery of the classroom material, then is the only way to increase teacher professionalism to get "better" students?*

Teachers' psychological rewards for working hard come from their concrete observations of student learning within their own school and classrooms. Faced with statistics to show that students in their school are simply average, a dedicated teacher will be able to point to a student who has made progress on a particular concept this week, or another who has picked up a whole range of cognitive skills that were lacking at the beginning of the year. Seeing the results of their own efforts is, for teachers, as important as it is for physicians to see patients getting well, or for lawyers to see clients whose lives have been improved because of their interventions. But learning, as it is normatively defined, is not equally distributed among our students, and neither is teachers' sense of efficacy in their work. Research suggests a strong association between the socioeconomic characteristics of students and their communities and teacher satisfaction and engagement with teaching.[4] Compared with teachers of more affluent children, teachers who work with students from poorer families are more likely, for example, to believe that their students bring behaviors into the classroom that make teaching difficult and that they have little influence over their students' learning. In addition, teachers in schools with a higher proportion of minority children are more likely to feel that their efforts are not rewarded with student engagement in learning. Is it surprising, then, that we find many teachers claiming that "if you gave me students who were prepared to learn, I could be a great teacher"?

The interconnection between teacher and student engagement and social class is empirically demonstrated in recent qualitative studies (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Metz, 1990), as well as in those based on large-scale survey data (Dworkin, 1987; Brookover, et al., 1979; Purkey, Rutter, & Newmann, 1986; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Dworkin (1987), for example, reports that teachers in schools with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be burned-out and disengaged, and Purkey, Rutter, and Newmann (1986) show that teachers in urban schools (presumably with higher proportions of children from lower socioeconomic contexts) are less satisfied with their work.

Metz's (1988, 1990) study of eight "ordinary" high schools is highly pertinent to this argument. Metz used detailed descriptions of three of the schools to demonstrate that the socioeconomic characteristics of the community affect not only the characteristics of students, but also the behaviors of parents in relation to teachers, the socioeconomic and educational characteristics of teachers who are recruited to the schools, the behavior of

the principal, and the expectations of the role that education will play in the life expectations of children.

Here is the "Catch 22" for urban schools: Unless teachers are engaged with teaching and feel that they are effective, students are less likely to make rapid progress in learning—and this is particularly true for schools with a high concentration of lower income and minority students. Because teachers' work and students' work are inextricably intertwined, teacher alienation is a primary stumbling block to improving students' engagement with their own education.[5] From the student's point of view, teacher engagement is a prerequisite for student engagement; and from the teacher's point of view, student engagement is, in turn, the most important predictor of teacher's interest and effort.

Compared with teachers of more affluent children, teachers who work with students from poorer families are more likely, for example, to believe that their students bring behaviors into the classroom that make teaching difficult and that they have little influence over their students' learning.

In traditionally organized settings where teachers' lives focus almost exclusively upon their classroom, it is not surprising that they find their students predominantly those of the middle classes and the higher tracks to be the most responsive and best prepared. It is not surprising that these teachers also feel the most rewarded, since both the positive reinforcement and the demands from students and parents to teach well are quite high. This is the "iron law of social class" in schools, which suggests that:

1. The higher the socioeconomic status of the community, the higher the value placed on education.

2. The higher the value placed on education, the more the system will press teachers to perform.

3. The greater the pressure on teachers to deliver, the higher the performance of the students.

The implications of this line of argument are clear: First, low performance of students in lower socioeconomic communities is largely the fault of the community itself; and, second, the only way to change this is to pressure teachers to have "high levels of expectation" in opposition to the community (see also Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

The argument that teachers depend on their students for their professional satisfaction is empirically accurate, but fails to acknowledge how school organization can affect teacher engagement. The research summarized here began with the perspective that it is not possible for teachers to change students' social origins nor community resources. However, it may be possible to change the relationship between social class and teacher commitment and engagement if we create organizational conditions that make it easier for teachers to experience success with students.

What Is Teacher Engagement?

> *Portraits of unengaged teachers have been at the center of discussions in the recent reform literature. In our own study we heard such teachers described as "bored teachers who just go through the textbook and aren't thinking"; teachers nicknamed "Mrs. Ditto or Mr. Filmstrip"; teachers who "taught one year, for thirty years"; and teachers "who barely know their students' names."*

Four distinctive types of teacher engagement can be identified, two of which are *affective* and focus on human relationships in the school, and two of which are *instrumental* and focus on the goals of teaching and learning:[6]

- *Engagement with the school as a social unit*. This form of engagement reflects a sense of community and personal caring among adults within the school and promotes integration between personal life and work life. We see this form of engagement among teachers who "wouldn't want to work at any other school," who refer to peers and students as friends and family, who attend after-hours school events as often as they can, and who are quick to rally together if faced with a troubling event.

- *Engagement with students as unique whole individuals* rather than as "empty vessels to be filled." Teachers demonstrate this type of engagement when they lead classes in ways that acknowledge and respond to students' thoughts and knowledge, listen to their ideas, involve themselves in students' personal as well as school lives, and in general make themselves available to students needing support or assistance. Many types of formal and informal coaching, sponsoring, mentoring, and counselling activities are additional examples of engagement with students.

- *Engagement with academic achievement*. Curriculum writing and development, sharing ideas and experiences about teaching as a craft with other teachers, making good and creative use of class time, expressing high expectations for performance, providing useful feedback to students, and actively considering how students are assessed are all ways teachers can be engaged in their students' achievement.

- *Engagement with a body of knowledge* needed to carry out effective teaching. Particularly in secondary schools, teachers need to keep current in their content fields and incorporate new subject-related ideas into their classrooms. Expressing one's personal passion for a subject, seeking ways to connect the subject to students' lives, being involved in professional organizations, and pursuing advanced degrees in one's field can be examples of this form of engagement.

. . . it may be possible to change the relationship between social class and teacher commitment and engagement if we create organizational conditions that make it easier for teachers to experience success with students.

Most teachers are engaged with their work along multiple dimensions when they enter the profession. Over time, engagement is

almost always affected by the presence and absence of various *demands* on teachers, including the demands teachers place on themselves and the demands of their students, peers, principal, and students' parents—not to mention the immediate demands of the school environment. While demands may be stressful, they can also energize. Students who ask for more instructional support and parents who involve themselves in the school create an environment of high expectations for teachers. In order for engagement to be sustained, however, teachers (like students) also need consistent *positive reinforcers* that are meaningful and rewarding (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Wehlage, Rutter, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

The four types of engagement are distinct, but they are not necessarily reinforced by unique structures or activities. For example, a staff development retreat focusing on cooperative learning can support the development of both a sense of community among adults and a focus on student achievement.

According to some popular case studies, the most unpromising contexts—where demands on teachers are low and positive reinforcers limited—can still generate some forms of teacher engagement, often based on friendships among the faculty (Kidder, 1989; Freedman, 1991). But teacher engagement based on only a few of these dimensions will not necessarily serve students well. A staff may be highly engaged with the social community of adults in their school, but neglect students and achievement. Or, they may become so obsessed with achievement that they remain distant from groups of less able students. There may be no formula to determine the inducements for any specific teacher to stay actively involved with teaching. Still, dramatic imbalances can be counterproductive to the functioning of the schools. Each form of engagement may be desirable, but all need to be present for teaching to remain vital and effective for all students. Thus, redesign of the school organization so that teachers working with disadvantaged children enjoy the same opportunities for engagement as those who work with more advantaged children is as fundamental to improving education as altering our conception of authentic school work.

A Profile of Urban Schools With High Engagement

From 1987-1990, we conducted research in eight public, nonselective high schools actively involved in reform.[7] We chose a diverse sample of community environments from different regions of the country. One school was in a predominantly affluent community, three schools—one suburban, one rural, and one urban—were in mixed socioeconomic communities, and four served communities where over half of the student body came from disadvantaged homes including students from poor, minority, and immigrant families. In order to illustrate how schools serving the disadvantaged can secure for their teachers working conditions similar to those of schools serving more advantaged students, we focus on three of the schools, referred to here by pseudonyms.[8] These three schools had the least affluent student bodies of all the eight schools in the study, based both on principal reports and our own observations. However, when we analyzed survey data and looked at measures of engagement with teaching, they had reported levels of engagement for the average staff member that were as high or higher than the more affluent schools, although their objective working conditions (according to them)

were worse.[9] Nevertheless, they brought effort, energy, and hope to their teaching tasks in excess of what would be expected. Particularly striking was the fact that teacher engagement in the three schools was higher than in two other schools where most of the students were from minority and non-English speaking populations. Thus, in these schools we believe that the effects of the racial composition of the school were not particularly important.

Thus, redesign of the school organization so that teachers working with disadvantaged children enjoy the same opportunities for engagement as those who work with more advantaged children is as fundamental to improving education as altering our conception of authentic school work.

Before describing the schools, it is also important to add that, although these are all secondary schools, there is no reason to believe that their experiences are irrelevant to those of urban elementary schools. There is mounting evidence to suggest that developing positive working environments for teachers may be easier in elementary schools than secondary schools because of the latter's greater complexity (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1994). However, the important factors affecting whether urban teachers perceive their work as rewarding are similar at all levels (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

City Park Secondary School

City Park is a small, innovative secondary school located in the shadow of a public housing project in an impoverished section of a major northeastern city. Poverty, crime, drugs, and violence touch the lives of the community members on a daily basis. The school shares a large 1950s era building with two other small schools—a common practice in the district, which allows high school parents and students to choose which school to attend. Although the immediate neighborhood is largely Hispanic, the school aims for a diverse enrollment and has largely succeeded: Its student body is approximately 45 percent black, 35 percent Hispanic, and 20 percent white, with a broad range of academic ability.

Opened in 1984, the school is rooted in the progressive education tradition and is structured around the following principles: minimization of bureaucracy; a humanistic, open environment characterized by equal respect for staff and students (students do not need passes to go to the bathroom, and students and staff are both addressed by their first names); no tracking; a core curriculum planned and developed by teams of teachers; significant team planning time that is used primarily for curriculum development; instructional/learning strategies that emphasize The Coalition of Essential School's focus on "essential questions" and inquiry; parent involvement; and an overall sense of family. The school enrolls around 600 students in three divisions (grades 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12), which are further divided into houses of about 80 students. There are no traditional departments, but within each division there is a Math-Science Team and a Humanities Team, each consisting of about five teachers. Teams meet weekly for two hours and are the primary unit for developing and coordinating

curriculum, sharing ideas, and discussing what has and has not worked. Scheduling is nontraditional, with students and teachers meeting for two-hour blocks. Because of the division structure, students stay with the same teachers for two years and are also attached throughout the high school years to a single advisor. The daily one-hour advisory period focuses on guidance for academic and personal growth and reinforces the "family" atmosphere of the school.

Brigham Alternative High School

Unlike City Park, Brigham is the only alternative school in the small southern city in which it is located. It was designed to provide an alternative school experience to any student wishing to enroll. Established four years ago, the school sought to emphasize "open education" values, stressing a more interdisciplinary curriculum and student responsibility for learning. As the only school in the district permitted to take students from outside its enrollment area, Brigham has been used as a "dumping ground" by other district schools and has struggled with its image as a place where other schools could send their most troubled and least successful students. Eighty percent of the student body is black, and most are from working class or very poor families.

The school's evolving educational philosophy is based on experiential and cooperative learning, mixed ability grouping, a humanistic curriculum, and an informal environment. However, the implementation of this philosophy is inhibited by a rigid outcomes-based district curriculum and testing program, known as CBOK (Common Body of Knowledge), as well as a local culture that still strongly supports "paddling" as a form of student discipline.

The organization of the school has traditional components with department heads, 50-minute periods, and age grouping. In some departments there are grade-related teams so that a small number of teachers are able to become more familiar with all of the students, thus permitting easier monitoring of student performance and personal problems. The school uses an advisory period, which provides an environment for some guidance work and an opportunity for more personal interaction between students and teachers. The school also has several committees to deal with shared governance.

Hillside High School

Only a few miles from a medium-sized, border-state city, Hillside appears remarkably bucolic. However, a court-ordered desegregation plan changed this self-contained district to an "urban school" virtually overnight. Unlike City Park and Brigham, Hillside is a long established and large (over 1,000 students) comprehensive high school with a traditional curriculum delivered by 13 departments in a six-period day.

The community is one of the oldest in the state, but has never prospered. Several large industrial complexes have either closed or cut back their work force, which has led to high levels of local unemployment. The educational level of the community is quite low, and the graduation rate has recently been only about 65 percent, with only 30 percent of the graduates going on to some form of postsecondary education. Three-quarters of the student body are "local red necks"—a term students and staff use freely—one-quarter are African-Americans bused in from the city.

Only five years ago Hillside was viewed as one of the worst schools in the district; now there is a waiting list of teachers who want to transfer in. For the past four years the school has been involved in major reform efforts stimulated by a local professional teacher academy's concern with teacher reform. More recently, the school has become involved with Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools. Establishing ties with both the local academy and Sizer's Coalition has been approved by a staff vote and is strongly supported by the principal. The most critical change was the *steering committee*, composed of elected faculty members, the principal and assistant principal, a counselor, the athletic director, representatives from the district's teacher center, students, parents, and an elected member of the nonprofessional support staff. The open meetings of this committee are the vehicle for developing new directions at Hillside, although most of the work is carried out in subcommittees. The steering committee has introduced new programs such as teacher guided assistance, a daily period used for teachers to work with students on specific academic problems or issues; multidisciplinary curriculum units; and a "9th grade bridge," which focuses on the development of an interdisciplinary curriculum and team teaching of a group of approximately one-third of the incoming freshman class who appear most likely to drop out.

How Do Some Urban Schools Organize to Increase Teacher Engagement?

In this section of the paper, I will use the voices of teachers in the three schools as they explain why they are engaged in their work, and I will interpret and summarize the implications of their comments. Most of the teachers are experienced and have worked in other schools in the same district. Thus, they often compare the features of City Park, Brigham, or Hillside to other contexts that did not promote the same level of commitment to work.

School Culture

All three of these schools share norms and values that make teachers' worklife different than it would be in conventional schools and that have a significant positive impact on teacher engagement.

A Strong Sense of Being in "A School With a Mission":

> *A mission and vision create social pressures and psychological rewards for teachers who commit to the school and to its version of educational excellence.*

Teachers in all three schools emphasized how important it was to them to be part of a school that had (or was striving for) a collective definition not only of its goals (high achievement) but also of its strategies for reaching them. A teacher at Brigham spoke for most of her colleagues when she said:

> *I was attracted to this school because of the philosophy . . . I was approached by a faculty member here . . . plus I had worked with the principal before . . . . We had the same ideas about education.*

In City Park, where the instructional approach was most clearly articulated, the need to both live the mission and draw energy from it were mentioned by many faculty:

People know that . . . if you want to work in this school, that [the team approach] is the bottom line . . . . I think [it] makes the job of teaching a creative experience, and creativity feeds on itself.

And at Hillside, where the faculty were still struggling with the precise nature of the "special quality" of the school, there was still a strong sense of being engaged in a risky, but exciting joint venture. As one physical education teacher said:

My personal goals, as far as teaching, go along with this school . . . . And after 23 years of teaching, to have that freedom to do some things, and the fact that I do not work alone anymore, that I work with a group of people—it's made it so much easier.

Developing or being part of a collective vision of education demands exceptional commitment not just to an idea, but also to both the students and the other adults in the school. As one City Park teacher put it, when asked if she would want to teach somewhere else, "There *is* nowhere else to teach." Teachers at Hillside and Brigham also reported that *collective* commitment was important, which made it hard on the more individualistic teachers, some of whom "converted":

Some of the people . . . that I never thought would come "on board" . . . have finally come around and have started working on things [with us] because they felt like they've wanted to and they needed to.

An Emphasis on Closeness Among Staff Members:

In urban schools with high teacher commitment, staff emphasize the need to support each other, both personally and professionally.

Teachers in the three schools view each other as a source of personal as well as intellectual support. This mutual reliance engenders much discussion about the nature of interpersonal relations in the school, and how they are different from other settings. At Brigham, this special quality was often described in terms of family imagery:

Sure, this is what we stress here, this family group, this closeness . . . . We are trying to be close to each other [as teachers], and know each other . . . .

In City Park, there was less use of the family imagery to refer to relationships among adults. However, there was much talk about trust:

When I came here . . . I had to learn a lot. I got a tremendous amount of help. [The principal] helped me; [another teacher] with 14 years of experience became my best friend here . . . I used to meet him every morning to talk about what we were going to do and how we were going to do it . . . and he would come observe my classes.

At Hillside, similar comments were heard, with the most frequent being, "Everyone here is supportive." In all cases, the interpersonal relationships were viewed as a way of helping teachers continue to make the efforts required to meet student needs.

An Emphasis on Respect and Caring for Students:

> *If you are teaching the kids, you see where each kid is and what their next step is. You have to perceive all of the differences . . . you have to handle the resistance so that they may make steps for themselves . . . . You have to do that, and that is an engaging process.* (Teacher from City Park)

The emphasis on caring for students and the way in which it is intertwined with teacher and student engagement is probably best summarized by the above quote from a teacher from City Park, who points out that meeting each student as an individual—no matter how difficult that student might be—can be stimulating in itself.

The importance of respect and caring as significant aspects of teachers' work in restructured schools has been extensively developed elsewhere (Noddings, 1992), but it is empirically demonstrated in these urban high schools.

In Hillside, students talked openly about teachers' caring, but related that caring to the task of learning rather than simply to an affective relationship:

> *They're out to help you. They want you to learn. They will also sit down with you a lot of time, I mean work personally [with you]. It seems like they'll do it all the time, you know, to make sure you understand it.*

At Brigham, caring was built into the school's vision, which emphasized the affirmation of individual worth. Brigham teachers saw this as a critical feature of the school because it gave teachers as well as students a sense of self-worth:

> *[This school] emphasizes self-worth. And if you can encourage, or you're successful in helping and enabling a person to feel good about themselves and about what they are doing, then the opportunity for that person to be a successful person is enhanced significantly . . . . We* are *doing that [emphasis added].*

Thus, although in different ways, staff in all three schools emphasize that caring helps to make schools work for urban teachers. Caring is good for students, of course, but it is also good for the adults who work with them. Caring makes schools into ethical and moral environments, not just arenas for "getting the job done." Studies of beginning teachers indicate that the desire to be involved with a profession that has a moral character is a significant motivation. This is not simply altruism, but the teacher's need to be engaged in work that has significance.

A Demand for Active Problem Solving Among Teachers:

> *For urban teachers, the sense of being responsible for unearthing and solving problems is the most powerful form of empowerment they encounter.*

The theme that responsibility for problem solving is an engaging feature of the school setting arose repeatedly in the three schools. Teachers felt that they—not the principal, nor the district, nor the community—were accountable for creating a solid educational experience, and they reported that this also made them feel more competent. At City Park, one teacher commented about the way

in which the problem-solving focus was reflected in student-teacher relationships:

> *The assumption is that the kids are basically trying to do the best that they can, and that might not be so great at a given point in time, and you try to get everybody together and acknowledge that there's a problem rather than trying to blame someone. You try to deal with what the problem is, what are the different factors, and what can we do to change the situation. And that's the way problems are dealt with, even academically.*

The problem-solving focus was also articulated in Hillside and Brigham, where the emphasis was placed on the responsibility given to teachers to manage their own environment. As one new teacher explained:

> *If you have an idea [you go to the principal] and usually, if you give her your idea she will say, "And how do you plan to put this idea into action?"*

We observed another new teacher making the following remark to her colleagues in a meeting:

> *You're all talking about what you want to accomplish at school . . . . At every other school I've ever been in they would be complaining and whining and griping and saying how bad the administration is. You all are figuring out what you're going to do—that's good, and it's really different.*

Although part of taking responsibility comes from demands, it is also evidence that teachers felt that they were given permission to solve problems in ways that they did not previously experience. Even in Brigham, which was located in a very centralized district, teachers saw themselves as being able to be more active in looking for and solving problems:

> *My husband, who teaches in one of the other high schools . . . he's surprised that [we] are allowed to make decisions that stick . . . you know, about teacher time, teacher responsibility . . . .*

It should be noted that, at all of the schools, it was expected that teachers would take it upon themselves to help students preserve constructive human relations. Rather than delegating this to other personnel, as is often the case in both urban and nonurban high schools, these teachers took action:

> *I used to walk past two kids rolling around on the floor, having a fight. That wasn't my business, that was up to the security guards. That doesn't happen here. Everything that happens is everybody's business. After all, in your house, if your kids are acting crazy, your husband doesn't wait until you get home!*

As a consequence of this strong focus on teachers and students working together to solve problems at their source, disciplinary problems were, for the most part, rare.

<u>Peer Pressure to Work</u>:

> *Engaged teachers have high expectations of each other, and the friendly competition to work hard and achieve success with students is viewed as energizing.*

Life in the three schools was more demanding than in most schools—but worth it because the high expectations that teachers had of one another were coupled with stimulation and support.

As one Brigham teacher said:

> *The teachers [who] have left here and gone to other places in the district . . . have said "Gosh, I miss it." They go to the[ir] room and they work. And after the school bell rings they hit the cars. [There's no interaction with other teachers.]*

Another remarked:

> *We have had meetings [at this school] where we went through cooperative learning until 5:30 . . . but, at [school X], no one helped . . . . And when I worked at [school Y], . . . each teacher was out for themselves.*

City Park teachers talked about being exhausted, feeling that the work of curriculum development and active teaching had no end. But none of the teachers said they wanted to leave. At Hillside, another teacher commented:

> *I do a lot more work and spend a lot more hours here, and I have to get along with a lot more people but I enjoy it more and so it is worth it.*

Peer pressure to work proves more engaging because it is tied to a sense of doing work that addresses the vision of the school. It also has visible payoff in the students—kids that are often viewed as uninterested in school. Peer pressure also increases teacher engagement because it is usually coupled with valued professional feedback from peers. Where teachers collaborate with demanding colleagues their best work becomes more visible. Of course their failures may also be visible, but other norms, especially teachers helping one another, cushion the potentially negative impact of more exposure. At Hillside, where experienced teachers are working with the same types of students as they have in past years, several spoke with amazement about the differences:

> *My biggest ego booster this year has been several teachers who have come to me and said, "You know what? I've got some kids in my class that took your program last year and they are better prepared than the rest of the kids in the class." That has happened three or four times from three or four different teachers and that really makes me feel good . . . .*

School Organization

Although professional culture (as defined by the conditions discussed in the previous section) is at the heart of teacher engagement, a variety of organizational changes helped to reinforce or revive the staffs' commitments to teaching.

<u>Creating Structures to Promote Teacher Decisionmaking</u>:

> *When teachers are part of important decisions, they also want to be active problem solvers.*

The principals of these schools went beyond informal, open-door discussions and problem solving. They also built new formal decision-making structures that helped teachers to create the active problem-solving culture discussed above. Although teachers valued

informal opportunities to give opinions or make suggestions, being a part of a formal decision-making body was an important symbol of their professional position and responsibilities in the school. At all three schools, teachers explicitly drew the connection between involvement in formal decisionmaking and their responsibilities for making the school work effectively. At Brigham, one teacher first pointed to a "right" that teachers had as part of their formal empowerment and then to a responsibility:

> *We have the opportunity to influence things that are going on, such as electing the assistant principal. We . . . come up with meaningful plans and implement them.*

At City Park, the faculty see the entire school structure as designed for empowerment, and viewed the democratic process as integral to the educational experience they structured for students:

> *We are a decisionmaking school. We work as a whole school, we work . . . within our team and . . . within our classrooms where even kids are allowed to make some decisions about how things are to be done.*

At Hillside, the steering group structure worked well for teachers because it was tied to the kinds of curriculum renewal that were at the heart of their interests. Thus, it was the teacher-designed task forces that won their real commitment of energy. In summary, formal empowerment was viewed as important by teachers because it was tied to their responsibilities in the classroom.

Creating Structures to Promote Collaboration:

> *In all three schools, teachers linked high levels of engagement to spending more time with each other.*

Changing the way in which time is used in schools is one of the most difficult tasks of school reform. However, two of these schools had been restructured so that teachers had more time to work together. In the third school, part of the peer pressure was to put in extensive after-school time on collaborative work. This not only strengthened personal bonds, but also infused new enthusiasm about instruction. City Park's schedule provides teams with a weekly two-hour meeting in which they develop curriculum, teaching strategies, and student assignments. The schedule reflects the value the school places on the teachers' own engagement with their academic program:

> *In my other school, what I was good at, I stayed good at. What I wasn't good at, I never improved . . . . I really could have been in the building all by myself. There were never times when you could get together and discuss issues with other teachers . . .*

At Hillside, collaborations usually revolve around task force work or time spent in groups at the district's professional development center (both were covered by the use of substitutes). In Brigham, due to lack of resources and the school's inability to change district-imposed schedules, collaboration was more informal. The exception was the school's strong development work with cooperative learning.

The reduction in isolation was apparent in all settings. A Brigham teacher said:

> *I have found . . . professional collegiality presented here that my husband does not benefit from even though he's been at his school for twenty years . . . . I mean, I have teachers on their off period come by and sit in my classroom that are not even in the English department . . . .*

A Hillside staff member pointed to the collaboration-engagement link:

> *We work together on so many things [because of the steering committee]. And one of the things that has opened up is that if I want to do something within math, there are teachers here that I know I can go to and they will help me teach that in my classroom.*

In City Park, the principal's work is based on a philosophy of collaboration, tying it to both teacher engagement and student engagement:

> *You must remove teachers from isolation and make learning exciting. To make learning exciting for students, you must make learning exciting for teachers, because, when learning is exciting for both teachers and students, kids can't get lost.*

A universal theme emerged that these schools: time spent with colleagues provided zest and stimulation for the more lonely task of teaching in the classroom. Time spent with adults in these schools was not "down time" used for relaxing, but creative time used for professional growth.

Clearly, collegiality boosts engagement in part because it increases interpersonal knowledge and the "family" feeling. It is important, however, to tie collegiality directly to the development of professional competence. At Hillside, with its enormous resources and new enthusiasm for change, each day was viewed as an occasion to learn from others:

> *There is tremendous opportunity to develop your skills and knowledge [in part] because of the collegiality that is so very prevalent. I mean, if you want to do it, there are people in this building that will do it with you. If you just want to sit back and be an observer, they'll let you come in and observe.*

Another teacher remarked:

> *Probably the nicest thing about being here at this school is the opportunity to use and/or develop skills and knowledge. And we do a lot of in-service giving. I mean, a lot of our faculty members give in-services to others.*

Both Hillside and City Park viewed their schoolwide retreats as critical structures for both personal and collaborative development. Yet, in none of the schools were the days officially dedicated to staff development as important as the provision of more ad hoc or semi-planned development opportunities. The importance of continuing experimentation and skill development to engagement is best summarized by a teacher from City Park:

> *We're not always doing the same thing. There's always something new to be thinking about . . . . It encourages you to think about issues, to grapple with important questions.*

In other words, to increase teacher engagement, urban schools must become learning centers for the professional staff as well as for students.

Creating Structures to Improve Curriculum:

> *Supporting teachers to write curriculum specifically for the students they work with can increase many forms of engagement.*

The problems surrounding curriculum in urban settings is profound. Some investigators have found that, in inner-city schools, teachers spent their energies on curricula of questionable benefit to their students, either teaching a traditional college preparatory curriculum to students lacking basic skills, or, conversely, teaching nothing but basic skills.[10] Unfortunately, journalistic and anecdotal evidence suggests that these responses are far from rare in urban schools.

Autonomy over curriculum was a feature in all eight of the schools we studied with the exception of Brigham, which has only recently been released from rigid district controls. Even at Brigham, however, teachers spoke of how they "worked hard to make [the curriculum] ours," by introducing, for example, interdisciplinary perspectives. In the three schools covered here, teachers develop curricula, units, lesson plans, and instructional designs in teams. Curriculum development and discussion of instruction are the focus of City Park's weekly team meetings. At Hillside, both departmental and cross-departmental curriculum development teams were common. We have already described how collaborative, group experiences benefit teachers. Beyond that, curriculum writing involves teachers in thinking about and discussing fundamental issues relating to knowledge and learning. Furthermore, they can calculate what level of knowledge and what kind of instruction best suits the specific students they teach. That process engages teachers in their students, in the academic program of the school, in the craft of teaching, and in the subject they teach.

Implications for School Leadership

> *There was consensus among teachers that a school with an ineffective principal was unlikely to be exciting no matter how talented the staff—and also that schools can become exciting quite rapidly after the arrival of a supportive principal.*

Having indicated several features of school culture and organization that teachers told us were engaging, we must turn to what can be done to promote them. The character of both Brigham and City Park was dominated by the fact that they were new schools and that most teachers had chosen to work there. This created a sense of being in a special place and of working with a special team. At Hillside, on the other hand, most teachers had worked there for more than a decade. Few thought of it as unique until recently, but now, teacher engagement at Hillside is nearly as high as in Brigham and City Park.

The factor that all of the schools have in common, however, is an administrative leadership pattern that promotes engagement. The role of the effective principal is described as one that facilitates staff to develop the culture described above, and one that also takes responsibility for designing and maintaining the organizational features that support it. However, there are some aspects of the leadership role that cannot be fully subsumed under the categories described above:

Buffering Teachers

Studies of conventional schools emphasize the role of the principal in buffering the teacher from unwanted outside interventions by parents.[11] In these three schools, however, principals emphasize respectful relationships with their communities regardless of parents' social position or history of support for education. While parents and community were invited in, two of the principals had to work very hard at buffering their staffs from the demands of district offices. At Brigham and City Park, located in district contexts that were not always supportive of their differences and autonomy, the principals sought to protect their staffs from distracting external demands and requirements. They recognized teachers' limited energies and struggled to preserve them for students and teaching. Simply having a principal who cared so deeply about protecting teachers increased engagement for many.

Spending Time on Daily Routines

Leadership in the eight schools did not conform to the image of the efficient executive who participates only in the highest level of policy and leaves the daily work of the organization to others. Instead, the principals were visible, had open doors, and were available for spontaneous discussion or problem solving. They spent time with students and tried to be always present at school activities, even when informal rewards were given. They were in the lunchroom and around the halls, not to discipline, but to gather information that would help them to continue to support teachers' work.[12]

Delegating and Empowering

Promoting conditions that acknowledge the professional capabilities and judgments of teachers was another shared quality of these principals. Principals who create healthy environments for teachers "make teachers invent solutions to problems—they aren't the only problem solver," explains one City Park teacher. The effective principal, says a Brigham teacher, "can leave the building without things falling apart or hitting snags, and has staff empowered to respond to crises." At Hillside, the following comment was typical:

> *She keeps the staff together . . . she does facilitate what we want to do. There are so many things going on in this building that even she admits that she no longer can keep up with what's going on. But what's really neat about [our principal] is that she trusts our professionalism so much that . . . even if she's not aware of every small detail, it's okay.*

At all three schools it is important to note that the philosophical conviction was to empower the group rather than the individual teacher. Communal decisions prevail (even when the administrators are not enthusiastic), and it is up to the individual to implement these collective resolutions with some autonomy and flexibility.

Confronting Unengaged Teachers

A very clear and direct way of stressing the importance of teacher engagement is to require changes in those who are not personally invested in the four types outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Teachers are

inspired to work hard by those around them, and over and over again the teachers in these schools stressed the positive impact of a principal's personal willingness to confront bad teaching. In these school there were plenty of supportive strategies to help less effective teachers improve, including mentor teachers—inviting teachers to visit one another's classes and help one another—and staff development opportunities. For example, Brigham's principal worked with several teachers who had difficulty changing to a teaching style that de-emphasized lecturing and teacher-centered instruction, ultimately encouraging one to leave, but creating a process for others in which they were able to make significant improvements. At City Park, some teachers experienced anxiety about their success with the groups of students in their "advisories," but the assistant director put a great deal of personal energy into sharing his knowledge about and experiences with dealing with students more personally. Still, it was clear that if a teacher was unable to develop supportive relationships with his or her students, they did not return the next year.

Providing Leadership About Values

Teachers agreed that the principal set the tone for developing a vision and a value orientation in the school. It is important for the principal to understand and reflect the best in community ethical standards and values, and, according to one Hillside teacher, to "make clear what is valued—don't keep faculty guessing about what is important." Leadership articulating strong values was most visible in Brigham and City Park, where each principal founded the school based on a particular educational philosophy. In both cases, that philosophy directly incorporates teacher engagement, since it is based on eliminating teacher isolation by creating opportunities for collaborative work. In large and well-established Hillside, the influence of leadership values is more subtle, but still acknowledged by all teachers, particularly with regard to increasing parent involvement, focusing on interdisciplinary curriculum development, and on caring for students.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers cannot change the social, political, and organizational conditions that affect urban schools. But, along with the principal, they share control of their own professional culture.

Many of the lessons for teachers who may hope to help create working conditions that are similar to those of City Park, Brigham, and Hillside are implied in the discussion directed toward principals. For example, unless teachers willingly join in discussions about values and what makes for good teaching, the most valiant efforts of an enthusiastic principal will not be rewarded. However, it is important to emphasize that teachers have a particularly critical leadership role both in getting started with an effort to make their schools more engaging environments and in maintaining them.

Trading Personal Autonomy for Collective Responsibility

For many good teachers, one of the joys of teaching is the freedom to experiment freely within their own classroom. In all three of these schools, however, teachers were willing to trade some of this freedom for the collec-

tive responsibility for curriculum, student and teacher behavior, and the quality of instruction. For many teachers—including those in City Park, which placed the greatest emphasis on the role of the group—this trade-off is not without costs. Some teachers pointed out, for example, that they couldn't spend as much time working on their disciplinary-based teaching as in other schools. Even enthusiastic teachers noted that there were some times when they wished they could just shut the door and use their old "stand and deliver" strategies for teaching. It is important that teachers are able to discuss both the gains and the losses that they encounter as part of this trade-off.

Accountability and Public Conversation

Implied in collective responsibility is accountability—if not to external constituencies, then at least to peers. Open discussions of teaching are not always comfortable because they sometimes require admitting one's own deficiencies, or they require pointing out the flaws in a colleague's approach. Genuine peer review and discussion are still rare in most schools, and peer evaluation programs are often viewed by teachers as not fully collegial (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Struggling toward candid but supportive discussions of practice is a key activity that promotes both personal caring for colleagues and an emphasis on quality practice (Kruse, 1995). Of the three schools profiled in this monograph, only City Park had achieved this fully. In Brigham and Hillside, such discussions were still relatively rare and confined largely to groups of other teachers who were viewed as mentors or like-minded friends. Only through such discussions do teachers establish real collegiality that is focused on teaching and learning, as contrasted with superficial cooperation and limited sharing (Little, 1990).

Owning the Curriculum

A key aspect of teacher leadership in all three schools was the teachers' consistent belief that they had full responsibility for the curriculum. Owning the curriculum is harder in practice than most teachers expect. Not all curriculum was teacher constructed, but teachers needed to accept the obligation to question all aspects of both content and instruction and to "fix" parts that didn't work for their students, even where district requirements and external assessment procedures created pressures to use a more traditional approach. This was most apparent in City Park, where teachers had the opportunity to discuss the curriculum during their regular team meetings and reinforce their commitment not to "teach to the [state-mandated] test." It was visible in both Brigham and Hillside as well, as was noted earlier. Again, because ownership of the curriculum was by the faculty as a whole, and not by departments or individual teachers in their courses and classrooms, teachers gained the kind of positive professional relationships with colleagues that enhanced their own skills and competencies, but they lost some freedom to do as they pleased.

Owning and Elaborating Professional Expertise

Defining a clear body of expertise needed to work in a particular setting is a very tough job, but it appears to be central to the work of these schools. Teachers came from different backgrounds, training institutions, and a wide variety of personal and professional

experience. Only in City Park were teachers recruited to work within a clearly articulated educational philosophy; in the other two schools, teachers were struggling to define the essential elements of their expertise and approach to teaching and learning.

Part of elaborating a basis for professional expertise involved taking charge of professional development. While all of the schools sought help from "outside experts," they also defined professional development as learning from each other. Seeking others and being sought out increased professional integration among the faculty, and it was also a source of reward. The sense of responsibility for acknowledging the skills of others and sharing one's own skills increased teachers' sense of professionalism as well as strengthened their commitment to their mutual development as teachers. Again, this implies a capacity for confronting personal and school weaknesses that is not a common part of school culture. Even if systematic reform with national curriculum and assessment frameworks emerges in the next few years, the need to assess and define needed expertise is a local job (Fuhrman, 1993).

Engagement and Time

The average United States teacher already works hard. Many surveys and studies suggest that the typical work week is more than 40 hours. But highly engaged teachers in urban schools appear to work even harder. The issue is not just hours (although teachers who accepted unusual leadership responsibilities for committees or curriculum work often did encounter exceptional demands on their time), but the demand for collective work. Teachers in these schools reorganized the schedule to accommodate additional meetings or used time after school in ways that they had not previously done. Raywid (1993) argues that time is the key to real school reform, particularly time for teachers to meet and talk. For many teachers, this time together initially feels exhilarating, providing a needed opportunity to talk about work with other adults. But enthusiasm may yield to frustration when meetings are unproductive (as some meetings always are), and when meetings are not directly related to classroom and student work in the short run. Teachers who have informal and formal leadership positions feel a special burden to make the extra time spent in group work engaging—a role for which most of them have had little or no preparation.

Balancing Emphasis on the Four Types of Engagement

We have argued that teachers need to maintain a balance on all four types of engagement, ensuring that neither the intellectual nor affective sides of the school are ignored, and ensuring that there is a focus on the needs of both adults and students. In urban settings, however, this is often particularly difficult when so many students come to school with basic needs unmet. In schools with large numbers of impoverished students there is a tendency for teachers' joint work to concentrate on these needs at the expense of developing the academic side of the school (Kruse & Louis, 1994). In the short run, meeting students' immediate personal needs provides teachers with a collective sense of "making a difference," but what happens in the classroom may not improve. Although this paper has focused heavily on the importance of adult relationships in the school, teachers must remain centered on the primacy of the school's educational function. While the principal may reinforce this basic value in the school, it is the teachers who

determine how they spend their time. If joint work focuses on both the affective and academic side of the school, it is because teachers make the choices to carry it out.

Conclusion

A teacher at City Park told us of a visit to her class by a Shakespearean actor: "This guy . . . transformed my class in a way I could never have done. I was overawed by how good he was with my kids . . . . He had one of my kids standing on her head!" Perhaps all of us dream of schools full of such people, but the prospect of transforming schools through charisma is unrealistic. Such people are rare and, as this teacher said, "You would run out of them pretty quickly!" Also, we have learned that even the most talented teachers can burn out if they depend on their individual personal resources as their only support.

It is also a mistake to allow teachers to depend only on students as a source of external support and feedback. Doing so may put thousands of teachers in frustrating and lonely work environments with dim prospects for high teacher engagement. At City Park, Brigham, and Hillside we have seen teachers who energetically invest in the personal and academic progress of their students, even though most of these students will not go to college. A variety of collegial, administrative, and structural supports help them remain engaged. Taking these examples as models, we need to think about how to change schools to encourage a productive mix of teacher engagement in all schools. Some strategies for accomplishing this goal are as follows:

Teachers' engagement with the school as a social unit or community is intensified most profoundly when there is a sense of vision or purpose about education and about the specific students they serve. The importance of individual purpose and motivation should not be underestimated, but the cases suggest that a supportive culture within the school can compensate significantly for the lower expectations from community and parents that prevailed in City Park, Brigham, and Hillside. Knowledgeable leaders play a pivotal role in establishing such a vision, but a range of planning and decisionmaking opportunities can quickly involve staff in doing the same.

Engagement with student achievement is also nourished by opportunities for teachers to collaborate together both on schoolwide decisions and on curriculum and instruction. Too often, collaborative activities converge only on the marginal necessities of school life, such as paperwork, purchasing, or staff parties. At these three schools, teachers participated in decisions regarding the fundamental issues of the school: the qualities of individuals to be hired as teachers, the abilities and needs of the students, the nature of teacher-student relationships, the content of the curriculum and the methods of instruction, and the setting or abolishing of policies. Professional dialogue over these tasks builds ownership and empowerment of the classroom in ways that "zoning of decisions" does not.[13] Collaboration also contributes to teachers' engagement with achievement because it provides opportunities for teachers to support and give feedback they may not always get from their students. Finally, opportunities to develop curriculum and instructional plans specifically for the students they serve allows teachers to assess an appropriate level of challenge for their stu-

dents, increasing the likelihood of student engagement in their work.

Engagement with students as whole individuals is expedited by structures that allow teachers to interact with students more informally and in smaller groups. But, beyond providing structures like advisory periods, we also found a general ethic of care for students. This cultural norm among engaged teachers acknowledges the links between students' emotional well-being and their readiness to learn. It serves to further emphasize respect and concern for students' lives as a whole.

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Engagement with subject matter took a somewhat different twist in the three schools, as compared with more typical high schools. The maxim that "elementary teachers teach students, high school teachers teach subjects" does not reflect the priorities of these schools. Many teachers stayed current with developments in their field through participation in local and national associations, yet it was clear that their engagement with their individual subject was often subordinated to an interest in providing a more interdisciplinary curriculum. More important was the emphasis placed on learning together how best to communicate subject matter, and working jointly on curriculum to ensure that subject matter was appropriate and exciting for the students.

The interrelationship between teacher engagement and organizational leadership and culture and structure is not simple. But the organizational reforms accomplished by these schools demonstrate how schools serving disadvantaged students can sustain levels of teacher engagement comparable to schools in higher socioeconomic circumstances. We acknowledge that the success of these three schools is not easy to reproduce. Communities did not pressure these schools to perform; rather, high demands for teacher performance and engagement were generated from within the schools. Furthermore, the schools we studied successfully freed teachers from depending *only* on students' daily classroom success as a source of professional satisfaction by providing a richer array of feedback and rewards from adults. At the same time, as a result of this feedback and increased professional interaction, teachers in these schools also felt a higher sense of efficacy in their professional competence (Louis, 1991b). This encouraged them to make greater investments in their success with students. Teachers in these schools gave themselves freely to the task of instruction and student achievement—but had resources to turn to if classroom success was not immediate or as profound as they had hoped. This is perhaps, the balance to which any restructured school must aspire in order to break the "iron law of social class."

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Endnotes

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2. This is also an argument that applies to rural schools. See Coleman and Hoffer, 1987.

3. The exception, of course, is the Superintendency, where national recruitment is the norm.

4. The interconnection between teacher and student engagement and social class is empirically demonstrated in recent qualitative studies (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Metz, 1990) and those based on large-scale survey data (Dworkin, 1987; Brookover, et al.; 1979) Purkey, Rutter, & Newmann, 1986; Bryk, et al., 1988; Lee & Smith, 1994). (See Hurn [1985] for a review of earlier empirical literature.) Dworkin (1987), for example, reports that teachers in schools with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be burned out and disengaged, while Purkey, Rutter, and Newmann (1986) show that teachers in urban schools (presumably with higher proportions of children from lower socioeconomic contexts) are less satisfied with their work.

5. Lee and Smith (1994) demonstrate that teachers' beliefs about their work and students have a strong effect on the equity of students' achievement in high schools.

6. See Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Firestone and Rosenblum, 1988; Wehlege, et. al., 1989.

7. The research methods used in the study are reported in greater detail in Louis and Smith, 1992.

8. Case accounts were completed in all three schools. City Park Secondary School was prepared by Sheila Rosenblum and BetsAnn Smith. Brigham High School was prepared by Stewart Purkey and Karen Seashore Louis. Hillside High school was prepared by Dick Rossmiller and Sheila Rosenblum.

9. Specific survey measures of teacher engagement are available in Louis, 1991.

10. See Mary Metz's research in "typical" high schools, summarized in Louis and Smith, 1991.

11. Rossmiller (1992) provides case studies of eight principals located in "traditional high schools" that emphasize the buffering role.

12. See also Louis and Miles (1990), who discuss the importance of "minding the store" in a major change project.

13. See Johnson, 1990.

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